



Meningococcal Vaccine

What You Need to Know

Deployment Medication Information Sheets (DMIS) are provided by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM). Written for soldiers and their families, they provide basic information on deployment medications that are intended as guidance only; consult your health care provider for more information.

What is the Meningococcal Vaccine?

The meningococcal vaccine provides protection against four types of meningitis caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*, Types A, C, Y, and W-135. This bacterium can also cause a severe blood infection called meningococemia.

What is meningitis?

Meningitis is an infection of the fluid of a person's spinal cord and the fluid that surrounds the brain. Symptoms include:

- High fever
- Headache
- Stiff neck
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Discomfort looking into bright lights
- Confusion
- Sleepiness
- Seizures

What is meningococemia?

Meningococemia is an infection of the blood. Symptoms are characterized by a rapid onset and include:

- High fever
- Chills
- Weakness
- Rash

How do you get meningitis or meningococemia?

The site for introduction of the bacteria is the upper respiratory tract and transmission can occur:

- Through inhalation of air-borne droplets
- Intimate contact
- Contact with objects freshly contaminated by an infected person's secretions

Who should get the vaccine and how is it given?



- The vaccine is required for new accessions into the Army.
- The vaccine is not required for entry into any country except for Saudi Arabia during Hajj—a pilgrimage to Mecca. You should get the vaccine if you are traveling to a country known to have a high rate of meningitis.
- Your health care provider will give you the vaccine in an injection in a single dose. It is not known how long the vaccine is effective, but appears to be effective for 3-5 years in those 4 years of age or older.

What does the military require?

The vaccine is required for military recruits and other military populations living in conditions of crowding who are at increased risk for meningitis; historically, outbreaks have occurred in recruit populations. Meningococcal vaccine may be indicated for deployment and travel to areas with a high incidence of meningitis such as the Africa's sub-Saharan region.

Are there any side effects?

Reactions to the vaccine are not common. If they do occur, they are mild—redness, tenderness, and mild pain at the injection site that lasts for 1-2 days. Headache and chills are also possible.

Is there any reason I shouldn't get the vaccine?

- Tell your health care provider of any illnesses, infection, allergies, or reactions to a previous vaccination. If you have an infection, your health care provider may delay the vaccination until you are better.
- Tell your health care provider if you're taking any over-the-counter or prescription medicine, especially steroids or prednisone.
- The vaccine will be less effective if it is given within 1 month of receiving immune globulin (IG) serum.

What if I'm pregnant or breast-feeding?

- The vaccine should be given during pregnancy only when clearly needed. Talk to your health care provider about the risks and benefits.
- It is not known if the vaccine appears in breast milk. Consult your health care provider before breast-feeding.

You can avoid getting meningitis!

- Get the vaccination as scheduled for protection from the four types of meningitis caused by *Neisseria meningitidis*.

Be sure the vaccination is recorded in your medical record.

Where can I get more information?

- Health care provider at your military treatment facility.
- Military Immunizations web page: <http://www.tricare.osd.mil/immunization/vaccines.html>
- CDC Specific Disease web site: www.cdc.gov/health/diseases.htm
- CDC Vaccine Information web site: www.cdc.gov/nip/publications/VIS/default.htm

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